



**Guidelines for  
EPISCOPAL - ROMAN CATHOLIC  
MARRIAGES**

Diocese of Western New York (Episcopal)  
Diocese of Buffalo (Roman Catholic)

The Rt. Rev. Harold Barrett Robinson, S.T.D.  
BISHOP



DIOCESE OF WESTERN NEW YORK

1114 DELAWARE AVENUE  
BUFFALO, NEW YORK 14209  
716-881-0660

February 1, 1982

Dear brothers and sisters,

I am thankful to be able to join Bishop Head in endorsing these guidelines for Roman Catholic-Episcopal marriages which take place in our respective Dioceses. They help us to be aware of the hard realities we must honestly face and yet sensitive to human needs and our goal of Christian unity. The priests from both Dioceses who prepared these guidelines have done their work well.

If questions arise concerning the implementation of these guidelines, please contact me directly.

Faithfully yours,

*+Harold Barrett Robinson*

+Harold Barrett Robinson  
Bishop of Western New York

HBR: gm



The Chancery  
Diocese of Buffalo  
35 Lincoln Parkway  
Buffalo, New York 14222

(716) 883-1372

January 25, 1982

Dear Friends,

During the past several months, Priests from the Roman Catholic Diocese of Buffalo and the Episcopal Diocese of Western New York have met to discuss guidelines for Episcopal-Roman Catholic marriages which would be acceptable to both Church communities.

These guidelines are the fruit of that labor and I am happy to join Bishop Robinson in endorsing them for use within our respective Dioceses effective immediately. I have approved these diocesan guidelines with the hope that they will contribute to the easing of those tensions which sometimes appear when a man and a woman of different faith traditions are united in the Sacrament of Matrimony.

May we all earnestly work and pray for that unity of the Church of Christ in which all of us may truly love one another as the Lord has commanded.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Edward D. Head". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "E".

Most Rev. Edward D. Head, D.D.  
Bishop of Buffalo

EDH/w

## **Suggested Guidelines for Episcopalian-Roman Catholic Marriages—**

### **Diocese of Western New York (Episcopal) Diocese of Buffalo (Roman Catholic)**

The marriage envisioned in these guidelines is one in which both parties are actively practicing members of their respective faith communities, and expect to remain such.

The following guidelines are intended as recommendations and practical suggestions, not as a set of inflexible rules. Every marriage has its own set of circumstances that may require, in the judgement of the pastor or parties, different treatment.

These guidelines make no attempt to consider or solve historical and theological differences that still condition the relationship between the two churches. Such questions are being dealt with elsewhere, and their eventual resolution will obviously modify any set of policies such as these.

Roman Catholics and Episcopalians share a common belief about the sacramental nature of marriage. They hold that it is meant to be a visible, lifelong union of husband and wife in heart, mind and body for their mutual joy, help and comfort and, God willing, for the procreation and nurture of children. Towards these ends, marriage was instituted by God at creation. Grounded in the natural order, it became, with Christ's advent, one of the sacramental signs and seals of our union with Him: ". . . A man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one. This is a great mystery, and I take it to mean Christ and his Church." (Ephesians 5:31-32)

Thus, by virtue of the Sacrament of Matrimony, married Christians signify and share in the mystery of the unity and fruitful love which exists between Christ and His Church. Roman Catholic and Episcopal churches share a common understanding and concern for the nurture of marriage. When members of our churches marry, by their ministry to each other, they open themselves to God's graces for the support of their marriage.

Married persons have a significant contribution to make to both church and community. They should always be aware of their special role and gift among the people of God in His Church. As their mutual love orders their common life within the family, so it also directs them to reach out in love and concern for others in shaping a society of human dignity.

### **Procedures and Topics for Counseling**

#### **A. Initial Procedures:**

1. The priest of the church where the wedding will take place should assume the primary responsibility for wedding arrangements such as the following:
  - a. Both the Roman and Episcopal priests have the responsibility of establishing that the couple is free to marry.
  - b. Pre-marital counseling — The Episcopal church normally requires a thirty (30) day notice before the wedding. The Roman Catholic church also requires sufficient notice preferably six (6) months. In both cases, the purpose is to provide ample time for counseling.
  - c. Planning the marriage service; and
  - d. Ensuring that the couple comply with the requirements of the civil law.
2. As soon as one priest is contacted by the couple regarding the marriage, that priest should contact the priest of the other church, or a local priest of the same communion, so that they may discuss how the responsibilities mentioned above will be met. It is important that preparation and arrangements be done in a cooperative manner from the very first.
3. When possible, a joint counseling session could be planned so that both priests can be present with the parties to the marriage. Such a session would promote an appreciation of the mutual respect that exists between the churches, and provide the couple an opportunity to discuss differences and similarities in the way the two churches perceive and practice the Christian Faith.
4. If for any reason a priest of one communion refuses to solemnize a marriage, and if the parties approach another priest of that same communion who agrees to do it, these two priests should, if possible, discuss the problem to arrive at some mutual understanding. Each should respect the decision of the other, however the matter turns out.

## B. Freedom to Marry:

1. Both priests will be concerned that the two parties be free to marry and intend a Christian marriage. The Episcopal and Roman Catholic priests will see that the forms required by each of their churches are properly filled out and/or signed.
2. If one or both of the parties has been married previously, both priests will present the situation to their respective diocesan offices for resolution.

It can happen that one church will declare a person free to marry, while the other one will not. In such instances, the persons to be married will decide what to do in good faith and conscience, and their decision should be respected. If the couple desires to marry, they should be informed that their action might restrict them in their relationship with their respective churches even to the point that they might be barred from receiving the Eucharist.

3. If it should happen that one priest decides to solemnize a marriage in which the other priest will not or cannot have any part, each priest should do his best to respect the good conscience of the other. In such cases understanding and generosity is called for from both priests.

## C. Pre-Marital Counseling: (See Appendix for information regarding programs offered by each church)

1. It has already been suggested that whenever possible, both priests conduct a joint counseling session with the engaged couple. It should be noted that joint premarriage conferences have proven to be a real blessing for both of our churches and are recommended. Yet, it is the primary responsibility of the priest of the church where the wedding will take place to counsel the couple in preparation for their marriage. Each priest must have the opportunity for counseling with the couple in order to highlight those unique areas which are part of their church's teaching and practice.
2. It is presumed that such counseling will include topics such as finances, and understanding of family background, personality differences, and sexuality.
3. Certain religious questions should receive special attention during counseling sessions. Essential areas include:
  - a. **Mutual respect:** Each party should be led to a better understanding of the religious traditions and convictions embodied in the church of the other party, and to show a trust and respect for the commitment of his/her partner. Each should also be encouraged to deepen his/her own faith and church commitment.
  - b. **Worship:** Each party should be encouraged to worship in the church to which he/she is united in faith. The couple should also, on occasion, offer praise and thanksgiving together in the church of the partner.
  - c. **Responsible Parenthood:** This is a sensitive area where both the priests and couple may have markedly different points of view. The topic should be thought through very carefully and discussed openly. In discussing the matter of children, each priest should raise all aspects of responsibility — moral, social, spiritual, and economic — and should carefully express the teachings of his/her church on such matters.
  - d. **Religious Education of Children:** The Roman Catholic Church no longer requires written or signed promises in this area. It does require that the Roman Catholic party "make a sincere promise to do all in his/her power to have all his/her children baptized and brought up in the Catholic Church."

Here again, the parties themselves will have to work out how they will handle this issue.

However the couple deals with the matter of children's church affiliation, they should be urged to bring their children to a deep appreciation of the person and gospel of Jesus Christ and a respect for the religious convictions of both parents. The parents should also make the children aware of the large areas of agreement between Roman Catholic and Episcopal Churches, as well as the differences between them.

- e. **Marriage as a Sacrament:** A common belief about the nature of marriage and the Sacrament of Matrimony between the Roman Catholic and Episcopal Churches

has been noted earlier. The sacredness and permanence of the marriage bond are affirmed by both churches and for the same reasons. This places marriage on a very high plane, and should be stressed by both priests, preferably in the joint counseling session with the couple.

#### **D. The Wedding Ceremony:**

By the time of the actual wedding ceremony, the couple and the two priests should have developed a mutual respect and understanding for the doctrines and disciplines of both churches. The wedding ceremony may then serve as a public witness to this mutual respect and understanding. For this reason, it is hoped that both priests will be able to participate in planning the celebration of the marriage.

For a wedding celebrated in an Episcopal Church, using the Book of Common Prayer, 1979, where the Eucharist is not celebrated, here is a suggested outline:

- The Exhortation (RC Priest)
- The Declaration (RC Priest)
- The Ministry of the Word (RC Priest with E Priest reading collect)\*
- The Homily (Either)
- The Marriage (E Priest)
- The Prayer (Either)\*
- The Blessing (E Priest)

For a wedding celebrated in a Roman Catholic Church according to the Roman Rite, where the Mass is not celebrated, here is a suggested outline:

- The Greeting and Collect (E Priest)
- The Lessons (E Priest)
- The Homily (Either)
- The Rite of Marriage (RC Priest)
- The Prayer (Either)\*
- The Nuptial Blessing (RC Priest)

\*It may be desirable or even preferable to encourage lay participation (family and close friends) at these points.

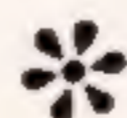
#### **The Eucharist:**

If the wedding takes place in either a Roman Catholic or Episcopal Church, it may, at the request of both parties, and with the agreement of both priests, be celebrated in the context of the Eucharist. In order to avoid undue tensions in the preparations for this joyous occasion, both parties should be made aware of current teachings and restrictions. Since inter-communion is not yet an official reality, patience and charity should be exercised by the parties and priests involved. The subject of the celebration of the Holy Eucharist should be raised in the joint counseling session to see if the celebration of the Eucharist at the wedding is appropriate.

#### **Recording of the Marriage:**

The Episcopal Priest is required to record in the parish register any marriage which they solemnize, regardless of where it takes place. The Roman Catholic Priest is required to record any marriage involving a Roman Catholic in the parish where it takes place.

The priest who makes the declaration of marriage will sign and return the Civil Certificate of marriage.



Pastoral guidance and counseling should be given to an interfaith couple by the Roman Catholic and Episcopal clergy throughout their married life. The clergy should stress the positive aspects of this union as a sign of the Christian unity we are all seeking. Hence, they should do all that is possible to help this couple realize that deeply religious lives are possible within the context of interfaith marriage.

The clergy should encourage the interfaith couple to make real the enrichment of their life together by jointly participating in each other's faith celebrations as frequently as possible. Such enrichment will come about through attending each other's liturgical celebrations; through renewing marriage vows on anniversaries in each other's churches; through educating their children in each other's religious traditions, through celebrating together family sacramental receptions — Baptisms, First Holy Communion or Admission to Communion, Confirmation, Marriage and Funeral Rites.

IT IS HOPED THAT MARRIAGES BETWEEN ROMAN CATHOLICS AND EPISCOPALIANS WILL BEAR LIVING WITNESS TO THE FACT THAT THE BARRIERS OF A DIVIDED CHURCH CAN BE CROSSED WITH STRONG BONDS OF LOVE AND LOYALTY AND WILL SERVE AS A REAL SIGN TO ALL OF THE TRIUMPH OF A HOLY LOVE OVER THE DIVISIONS OF THE CHURCH.

## APPENDIX

The following programs are recognized in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Buffalo as valid forms for marriage preparation:

1. **PRE-CANA:** a five hour, two night, lecture-style presentation by priest, married couples in areas of: communication, first year adjustments to marriage, spirituality of marriage, introduction to Natural Family Planning (7:30 to 10:00 p.m. each night)
2. **SATURDAY PRE-CANA:** a five hour, one day, program conducted by priest and married couples using mini-lectures and couple communication exercises on: communications, expectations in marriage, conflict management, spirituality-sacramentality of marriage, forgiveness. Includes A-V presentation on Natural Family Planning. Program includes lunch and concludes with prayer service (8:45 a.m. to 2:45 p.m.)
3. **JOURNEY INTO LOVE:** a six hour, one day program presented by the St. Ignatius Renewal Center, Clarence Center, using mini-lectures and couple communication exercises centering upon deeper spiritual significance of relationship and commitment. Program includes dinner and celebration of Eucharist. (2:00 to 8:00 p.m.)
4. **PERSONALIZED MARRIAGE PREPARATION:** a sixteen hour (2 Saturdays) program using mini-lectures and couple communication exercises in building communication and conflict management skills. Bess Associates Testing. Staffed by Msgr. Carr Institute and Catholic Charities people. Lunch is provided. (9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.)
5. **ENGAGED ENCOUNTER:** a weekend (Friday night to Saturday afternoon) program based on techniques of Marriage Encounter, presentation, reflection, dialogue. Conducted by priest and married couples team. Covers areas of communication, adjustments to marriage, sacramentality-spirituality of marriage. Liturgy provided both days. Penance available.
6. **CATHOLIC CHARITIES COUNSELING SERVICE:** for very young engaged couples, or couples with special needs anticipating marriage. Program individual.
7. **PRE-CANA FOR SPANISH-SPEAKING COUPLES:** a 12 hour (one day) program following the Engaged Encounter format. Bring your own lunch. Dinner provided. Program includes reconciliation service.
8. **SPONSOR-ENGAGED COUPLES PROGRAM:** a six hour (2 hours for 3 nights) program conducted by sponsor couple for one engaged couple, in home. Program uses brief sharing by sponsor couple and worksheets by engaged couple. Topics include: expectations of marriage, values and conflicts, sexuality and intimacy, sacramentality of marriage. Program presently operating in Region 28. Team from Family Life Department available to train sponsor couples for regions and parishes.
9. **PARISH PRE-CANA:** Some parishes conduct their own marriage preparation programs. For further information regarding individual parish programs, contact the Family Life Department.

The Episcopal Church requires counseling before marriage. Normally, this is done in private sessions by the priest of the parish.

Roman Catholic-Episcopal marriage partners should work out with the priests involved what programs they will take part in.